

Sunday School

PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY— EPHESUS.

Acts 19:8-20.

Lesson for August 15, 1909.

GOLDEN TEXT—"The name of the Lord Jesus was magnified."—Acts 19:17.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

M.—Acts 18:23-19:7. T.—Acts 19:8-22.
W.—Mark 1:1-8. Th.—Luke 3:7-18.
F.—Mark 1:21-28. S.—Mark 4:26-32.
S.—Eph. 3:13-21.

SHORTER CATECHISM.

Q. 68. What is required in the sixth commandment?

A. The sixth commandment requireth all lawful endeavors to preserve our own life and the life of others.

TOPICAL OUTLINE.

Paul's Great Work in Ephesus—

Three months in the synagogue, vs. 8.

Two years in the school of Tyrannus, vs. 9-12.

Jewish pretenders exposed, vs. 13-17.

Genuine conversion shown, vs. 18-20.

LESSON COMMENTS.

After Paul had spent some time—we do not know how long—at Antioch, he departed on his third tour of the churches which he had established, and also to visit Ephesus, where he had promised the people that he would return. It was his purpose to confirm these churches, especially as the Judaizers had been very active. Another object of his journey was the collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem.

We are not able to state with exactness who were his companions on this journey. Silas is no longer mentioned, having probably remained in Jerusalem. We know from 19:22 that Timothy was with him, and, from frequent references in his epistles written at this place, it appears that Titus was also with him. Erastus probably had been with him since his first visit to Corinth.

As to his route, it appears that it was the same that he had followed previously and that this was his third visit to some of the churches of this region.

As he was journeying toward Ephesus, events were taking place in this city which would forward the cause of the Gospel and would prepare the way for successful work on his part. A remarkable Jew, Apollos of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He had a high reputation for eloquence and had probably been well trained in the schools on the banks of the Nile. In addition to his natural gifts, he was "mighty in the Scriptures" and knew as much of Jesus Christ and his Gospel as could be learned from the teaching of John the Baptist. He may have received this knowledge from having heard John and seen the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, or he may have received it from others teachers. "He was instructed in the way of the Lord"—that way which John had come to prepare. We are also told that he had great fervor and zeal and diligently spread the truth as he knew it.

Speaking in the synagogue of the baptism of repentance, he succeeded in interesting the Jews and convincing them by the Scriptures that the times of the Messiah were at hand. Aquila and Priscilla attached themselves to Apollos and instructed him in the Christian religion as it had been taught them by Paul.

Apollos was disposed to pass into Achaia, and the disciples gave him a letter of recommendation to the Corinthians. He did much in Achaia in forwarding the work of the Gospel and helped them which had believed through grace, and convinced the Jews of the Messiahship of Christ through his accurate knowledge of the Scriptures.

The first visit of Paul to Ephesus, the residence of Aquila and Priscilla, and the preaching of Apollos, had gained the attention of the Jews of that city, so that when Paul came the second time the field was ready for the worker.

At his coming he found about twelve believers in Jesus Christ whose knowledge of the Gospel extended no further than that of Apollos when he first came. They had not heard the whole of the Gospel, but followed the teaching of John.

They probably had not heard of the resurrection, certainly not of the baptism of Pentecost. They had been baptized only unto repentance. Now, the Apostle shows them that John preached repentance to prepare men's minds for Christ, who is the only object of faith. When they heard the doctrine of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ they "were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." After the baptism Paul laid his hands on them and they received the Holy Ghost and spake with tongues and prophesied.

We next have an account of his labors in the synagogue. There he reasoned with the Jews with the same zeal that he had exhibited in the other cities which he had visited and at first his preaching was heartily welcomed, perhaps because of the labors of Apollos and the influence of Aquila and Priscilla. But after three months he experienced the opposition which had given him so much trouble in the churches of Macedonia. While many believed, there were others who were hardened and spoke evil of the Apostle's doctrine. Acting as he had done in Corinth, he withdrew his disciples from the synagogue and made the headquarters of the church in the "school of one Tyrannus" probably a teacher of philosophy or rhetoric and a convert to Christianity.

For two years after this the Apostle's labors were uninterrupted and a strong church was formed presided over by many presbyters. Paul's address to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:) throws some light on his labors during this period. Not only did he preach in the school of Tyrannus, but instructed his disciples "from house to house," warning each one of them "with tears." Not only did he engage in abundant pastoral work, but his own hands ministered unto his necessities and those who were with him. (Acts 20:34). Perhaps he still labored at his trade with Aquila and Priscilla.

Such incessant and untiring labor was felt not only in Ephesus but the gospel spread throughout all that part of Asia, and Ephesus became the mother of many other churches.

Ephesus was a city where magic and miracles flourished. It was renowned throughout the world for the worship of Diana. The image of this goddess which was supposed to have fallen from heaven had nothing in common with the beautiful forms of this goddess found in Athens, but resembled an Indian idol.

Upon the crown, the girdle and feet of the goddess were engraved mysterious symbols called "Ephesian Letters." These were regarded as a charm and were directed to be used by those who were possessed of evil spirits. Many curious stories are told about their influence. The study of these letters became an elaborate science and many books were written about their use and effects.

In contradiction to these charms, God through Paul wrought "special miracles." The word here means miracles out of the ordinary, calculated to oppose the peculiar superstitions and ignorance of the Ephesians. The "handkerchiefs and aprons," the means through which God wrought miracles of healing, were a refutation of the charms and amulets and mystic letters of the magicians.

These miracles attracted the attention of certain magicians, or exorcists, among whom were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew and chief of one of the courses of priests. They attempted to use the name of Jesus to call out evil spirits. These spirits though subject to Jesus and His Apostles, leaped upon those who used His name without being converted to His truth, using it for gain. The man in whom was the evil spirit sprang upon them and they fled out of the house wounded and naked.

Such an incident soon became known to all the city, and produced consternation among those who practiced the magical arts.

Some even among the Christians seem to have retained their attachment to the magical arts, but now they confessed and showed their deeds. A large number of sorcerers outside of the church renounced their practices and burned their magical books. These books were very valuable, worth about ten thousand dollars. This was a great victory for the gospel over the powers of darkness. "So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed."

It was during his ministry at Ephesus that Paul made a short visit to Corinth to correct certain abuses in that church and after his return he writes two epistles to the Corinthian Church.

T. M. Hunter.